

10 (pro-EU) reasons to be cheerful after Brexit

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As the dust continues to swirl around the momentous Brexit referendum result a month ago (and doesn't show any signs of settling anytime soon) I suspect many EU sympathisers will be somewhere in the middle of the various stages of the [Kübler-Ross Grief cycle](#): denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. So, somewhat incongruously, [are the 'leavers'](#). Whereas there are almost as many emotions being experienced on all sides as there are potential options on what will happen next both in terms of the UK's future relationship with the EU as well as the future of the EU itself, in this post I want to set out a number of (pro-EU) reasons – some obvious, some optimistic, others wildly speculative – to be cheerful amidst the uncertainty created by the Brexit vote.

1. It is worth reminding ourselves that (a version of) the EU existed before the UK joined in 1972 (with Denmark and Ireland) and it will survive its withdrawal. Brexit will not have the same effect as one of the founding six, and particularly say Germany or France, leaving the bloc.
2. The feared domino effect of other Member States agitating to leave has not transpired. Indeed post-Brexit [opinion polls have shown a bounce](#) in support for the EU in other EU Member states since Brexit.
3. Even were an in/out referendum to be held in another EU Member state, there are good reasons to believe (barring unforeseeable 'exogenous shocks') that a majority would not vote to leave. No other EU Member State has a national media so relentlessly hostile to the EU as the UK. The UK's [top-two selling national newspapers](#) (with a combined circulation as much as the next three put together) are rabidly anti-EU and [a study released during the referendum campaign](#) found that even the UK's supposedly 'neutral' state broadcaster, the BBC, had been overwhelmingly negative about the EU over the past *fifteen years*. Against this heavily Eurosceptic background, there was still only 3% difference between leave and remain in the referendum result. This augurs well for an EU referendum in an EU Member state with a less hostile media.
4. The referendum and its aftermath has increased curiosity, interest and knowledge about the EU and what it does among many previously disinterested EU citizens. Most obviously in the UK [where google reported a sharp rise in searches](#) asking was 'What is the EU?', albeit that this was *after* the polls had closed. Admittedly, much of this knowledge and information is starting from a pretty low base but any improvement has to be a good thing for the EU.
5. Ever since the last British government passed the [EU Act 2011](#), which requires referendums in the UK on certain future reforms at EU level, future EU reform would have been [considerably hamstrung by the UK](#) through the floating of a 'referendum veto' at every turn in negotiations. An actual referendum on future EU reform, even reform which would have been disproportionality advantageous to the UK, would have been very unlikely to succeed given the general eurosceptic feeling in the UK as exemplified in the Brexit referendum result. Future negotiations would therefore have involved even more protracted wrangling over EU reform than is usually the case, with increasingly less patience with the UK among other EU Member States. In the Brexit result, future EU reform has dodged a considerably large UK-shaped bullet allowing for better reform at the EU level at a time when it needs to be efficient and decisive in the face of the many issues it currently faces.
6. The Brexit vote has put EU legitimacy back on the agenda (again!). It provides a useful time to reflect on the broader legitimacy of the EU, particularly from the viewpoint of citizen knowledge about, and engagement with, the EU. Vital lessons can be learned from the way in which the EU was presented as well as misrepresented in the Brexit campaign debates and the extent to which EU questions tend to be dominated by domestic political concerns. This should feed into analysis and reflection on the never-ending project that is the enhancement of the EU's legitimacy. Furthermore, unlike the high-stakes, pressure-cooker atmosphere of the eurocrisis, the Brexit vote has been followed by an important 'cooling down' period (helped considerably by Cameron's decision not to push the Art. 50 button on his resignation) which allows for more probing and searching analysis into these

big questions and better solutions to be developed.

7. There are signs that a post-Brexit environment seems to have prompted a shift in how the EU and its member states deal with Eurozone governance. These are only tentative but the [soft-peddling by the Commission](#) of sanctions for breaching the excessive deficit rules in respect of Spanish and Portuguese debt may be the harbinger of a less confrontational, more constructive and collaborative approach to deficits by Eurozone Member States.

8. The post-Brexit era of examining the EU's legitimacy can also be taken as an opportunity to revise the workings of the Eurozone more generally. The rules which were forged in the crucible of the global financial crisis are understandable as products of their time but unsuited to the longer term legitimacy of the eurozone. As I've argued [elsewhere](#), the euro cannot live on rules alone; not least because its legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens requires more, much more. Broader EU level fiscal and revenue-raising mechanisms as well as proper institutional structures are necessary to make the euro more feasible and legitimate among the citizens of eurozone states if it is to have a future. The potential of Eurozone crises to undermine the legitimacy of the EU as a whole were dramatically showcased during the denouement of the Greek crisis last summer, however even [Schäuble's recent 'mis-spoken' comments](#) about Portugal serve to underline the necessary structural changes needed to make Eurozone governance more legitimate in the eyes of its citizens. This requires making it a genuinely EU affair (preferably the preserve of, or ultimately accountable to, the European Parliament) rather than a tussle between 19 individual member-state governments with the serious risk of xenophobic nationalism, rancor and discord [that this can lead to](#).

9. The post-Brexit era can also be exploited for further 'legitimacy learning' in the area of migration and particularly border management and the management of the considerable migration flows from Africa and the middle east in the past number of years. The moral case for allowing access to these individuals with a view to properly assessing and processing their asylum applications is clear; as is the moral case for some sort of burden sharing between EU Member States – it is wholly unfair to expect Mediterranean EU Member States (and particularly Greece after all it has been through) to shoulder the disproportionate burden of border management and asylum application processing. The [steps to redistribute the burden](#) among EU member states (or at least those who have not opted out of it) by the Commission are morally sound. However moral considerations are only one aspect of the broader political legitimacy of governing. For many EU Member states (particularly those far from the flash points of Mediterranean sea-crossings) it is one thing to sign up to free movement of (predominantly white, Christian, economically active and relatively wealthy) EU citizens and another entirely to be forced to accept quotas of destitute and desperate non-EU citizens who come from more contrasting cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds. From the EU's perspective, the moral case for accepting distribution is not enough. It needs to do more to explicitly link the benefits of free movement of EU citizens and a borderless Europe with the burdens of accepting percentages of large population influxes to the geographic area of the EU such as those experienced in the past number of years. This is particularly the case with EU Member states such as the Visegrad states (one of which is to [hold a referendum](#) on these burden sharing proposals) who have had comparatively little inward migration but whose citizens have benefitted considerably from the free movement of persons since joining the EU. Making this case clearly and coherently will also bolster the EU's legitimacy among those countries who have made the moral choice to accept large numbers such as Sweden and Germany but which are now overwhelmed. A fair distribution system which explicitly links the benefits of open-borders and free movement with the burdens of sharing population influxes would also demonstrate to these states the benefits of EU membership to achieve domestic humanitarian goals.

10. Finally, Brexit won't really happen. No, I'm not talking about the domestic legal challenges to [triggering Art. 50](#) currently making their way through the British courts, or claims that the referendum [was unlawful](#) or the possibility of a second referendum. Should the legal challenges proceed to judgment they will not succeed either because the law [doesn't prohibit the government triggering Art. 50](#) or in the absence of gross procedural irregularity no court, least of all a British court, would attempt to overturn the referendum result. Nor [will the referendum be rerun](#). Rather, I mean here the precise meaning of Brexit. Notwithstanding the new British Prime Minister ,banging on' that ,Brexit means Brexit', no one can say with the same certainty what exactly this means, least of all the Prime Minister herself. As [Andrew Moravcsik argued](#) in the run up to the vote, the U.K. will never ,really' leave the EU even if it votes to leave because it relies on the EU for so much of its current economic and political

stability as well as its security both internally as well as in its 'near-abroad' that a full 'extreme-Brexit' or 'Brexit-max' would be so utterly self-defeating as to scupper the political careers of those who negotiated any such thing. Both Theresa May and Boris Johnson as foreign secretary (!) know this only too well. Both have been gushing in their desire to maintain good relations with the EU post-Brexit since the formation of the new Brexit government. The final shape of Brexit is still too distant to predict with any certainty but it would seem that some sort of [Norway plus-or-minus](#) is the most likely scenario at the moment. From the EU's point of view this is more than satisfactory. Trade and free movement will continue (with some grumbling from the UK side on jettisoned referendum promises on immigration – although ['leave' already have considerable form here](#)) and any hastily drawn conclusions that Brexit demonstrates that the EU has passed its sell by date will be well and truly torpedoed. Perhaps the least scrutinized provision of Art. 50 in the welter of analysis of this hitherto neglected provision of EU law is Art. 50(5) which provides that:

"If a State which has withdrawn from the Union asks to rejoin, its request shall be subject to the procedure referred to in Article 49."

As the years pass by in the UK's newly minted 'Norwegian status' in the EU, the UK government may gradually come to the realization that it should have taken the conclusions of its own ['balance of competences review'](#) published in 2014 more seriously: that is, that prior to June 24th 2016, they'd never had it so good.

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